



Information Bulletin

*Governor's Office of Emergency Services
Law Enforcement Branch*

Charlie Simpson, Chief

PREPAREDNESS PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR PANDEMIC FLU VIRUS

By Robert Gerber, Deputy Chief
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"The pandemic clock is ticking; we just don't know what time it is."

Dr. E. Marcuse

BACKGROUND

Medical and health authorities have warned the world and placed a clarion call for government and citizens to take action in preparing for the onset of a pandemic flu virus. Currently, the virulent H5N1 strain of bird flu is appearing around the globe and is predicted to reach the U.S. in 6 to 12 months, if not sooner. While human to human transmission of the bird flu has not progressed beyond a few rare isolated cases, the possibility of the influenza developing and reaching major pandemic proportion must not be dismissed. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently released the "HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan" outlining specific actions that local, tribal, state, and federal agencies should consider in planning for this potentially catastrophic event. In California, the State Department of Health Services (CDHS) has published the "Pandemic Influenza, Preparedness and Response Plan," providing a framework for CDHS pandemic influenza preparedness and response activities.

Communities throughout California have begun to study the potential impacts of a major flu outbreak and have initiated plans and procedures to mitigate the effects of a deadly and disruptive flu pandemic should it arise. The occurrence and spread of the flu virus throughout California will present unique challenges and demand extraordinary effort by law enforcement agencies and personnel. Therefore, law enforcement agencies, at all levels of government, are *strongly encouraged* to engage in pandemic flu preparedness planning activities in coordination and cooperation with their respective health departments, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, fire services, and other pertinent organizations.

This bulletin has been prepared to assist law enforcement agencies in recognizing the severity and need to prepare for a flu pandemic, offer key considerations, and provide notable internet sites for further research and reference.

KEY LAW ENFORCEMENT PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Public safety agencies in California have extensive experience preparing and responding to a variety of emergencies. Often these events rise to the level of presidential disaster declarations. Furthermore, the advent of domestic terrorism has presented additional preparedness challenges to confront. However, the reality of a major pandemic flu outbreak spreading across our nation and state will present extraordinary circumstances that may be unfamiliar to the law enforcement discipline. As you review the list below consider your agency's level of service you can provide to your community with the additional responsibilities and missions brought on by a pandemic flu environment.

- ★ Agencies may want to invite their local health department or other appropriate organization(s) to provide an introductory briefing to command staff on the H5N1 bird flu situation and the potential consequences of a human outbreak of pandemic proportions. A review of existing plans and preparedness guidelines is advisable (see references below).
- ★ Agencies are encouraged to develop partnerships and enhance coordination with other local and state agencies including health departments, emergency management, fire service, coroner/medical examiner, emergency medical services, food/agriculture and volunteer organizations. Consider collaborating with these above mentioned key agencies to establish a "Pandemic Influenza Coordinating Committee" to foster a multi-discipline approach to community pandemic flu preparedness.
- ★ The World Health Organization estimates that an influenza pandemic will affect 30-50% of working adults! Agencies must anticipate and prepare for a reduced workforce due to the impact of the influenza on their own personnel. As an agency your plans should consider a 50% or more absenteeism due to the pandemic flu. Loss of staff to personal and family illness will be inevitable.
- ★ In a case of widespread, protracted pandemic, it is possible that local agencies would be hesitant to release personnel to assist other jurisdictions through the law enforcement mutual aid system. In that eventuality, the OES Law Enforcement Branch would confer with the Regional Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Coordinators and the heads of key state law enforcement agencies. It is possible that state law enforcement assets could be made available to assist local agencies if the traditional mutual aid system cannot fill requests for assistance.
- ★ In order to mitigate the loss of department personnel, agencies should provide individual and family preparedness guidance and information to be self-sustaining during the emergency. The more prepared your employees and their families are, the more you can rely on them when the emergency occurs. (This was an

important lesson learned in the recent Hurricane Katrina that struck Louisiana and Mississippi).

- ★ As an essential service, law enforcement personnel may receive top priority in receiving vaccinations against the identified flu virus. Law Enforcement agencies should review with their respective health and medical departments, pandemic flu immunization strategies and plans, and provide prevention and wellness education to employees.
- ★ The rare and unique condition of a flu pandemic may generate a multitude of “crimes of opportunity.” Law enforcement agencies should anticipate the various types of crimes that may occur during the uncommon scenarios inherent to a pandemic. Some examples may include vacated schools, office complexes and businesses that may be a target of burglaries, vandalism, etc. Also, as in many disaster situations, fraudulent schemes and practices are perpetrated, most often preying on the elderly.
- ★ Disruption of national and community infrastructures including transportation systems may require law enforcement to enforce travel restrictions, protect facilities, and provide essential transportation and escort details.
- ★ Under imposed quarantines law enforcement will be asked to enforce the order in coordination with their public health department and in coordination with adjacent jurisdictions. Discussions of the escalation of force and use of lethal force must take place in advance of the event.
- ★ Continuity of government operations plans should be reviewed or developed to consider the potential impacts of a flu pandemic. Critical functions such as dispatch and patrol operations may be severely impacted requiring alternative solutions and work-arounds.
- ★ Law enforcement agencies responsible for coroner operations may be subject to mass fatality situations in relatively short time frames. A high volume of influenza decedents may be processed from hospital and out-of-hospital locations. Storage and disposition of the dead may overwhelm existing facilities and resources.
- ★ A flu pandemic will most certainly generate emergency laws, ordinances, and regulations. Moreover, agencies should re-familiarize themselves with their authority to take specific actions under a pandemic health emergency.
- ★ Educate and inform your citizens through established volunteer groups, community workshops, departmental internet web site, etc., about the pandemic flu situation while promoting individual/family preparedness.

Please note that these planning considerations are but a few of the many issues and unusual characteristics in preparing and responding to an influenza pandemic. It is recommended that agencies review potential pandemic scenarios and conduct “readiness assessments” based on their ability to respond should their jurisdiction be impacted. It would be also worthwhile to study the consequences of the 1918 pandemic and its catastrophic worldwide, national, and local impact. Many of the planning considerations listed above can be applied to other types of disasters including biological, nuclear, and radiological incidents.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Volumes have already been written concerning the current pandemic flu situation and what may happen once it becomes contagious among humans. Selected below are a few of the internet sites that will assist you in planning for a flu pandemic. It is recommended your agency conduct further research by using available internet search engines, identify best practices, and collaborate with law enforcement agencies and professional organizations.

AGENCY/ORGANIZATION	INTERNET WEB SITE
World Health Organization (WHO)	http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/index.html
U.S. Health & Human Services (HHS), Pandemic Influenza Plan	http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/
U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Organization (OSHA), Guidance for Protecting Workers Against Avian Flu	http://www.osha.gov/dsg/guidance/avian-flu.html
U.S. White House “National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza”	http://www.whitehouse.gov
CA Dept. of Health Service (CA DHS) Pandemic Influenza, Preparedness and Response Plan	http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/izgroup/pdf/pandemic.pdf
CA Office of Emergency Services	http://www.oes.ca.gov
CA Emergency Medical Services Authority	http://www.emsa.ca.gov
U.S. one-stop access to pandemic flu information. Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families	http://www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html
U.S. Red Cross, Preparedness Checklist	http://www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/fdsk.pdf
Police Chief Magazine, January 2006 article, “The Pandemic Influenza Plan: Implications for Local Law Enforcement”, “Pandemic INFLUENZA and Bird FLU: The State of Delaware and Local Law Enforcement Preparedness” (FEB 2006), “QUARANTINES: The Law Enforcement Role” (FEB 2006).	http://www.policechiefmagazine.org

SUMMARY

“Because local law enforcement will play such a key role in the event of a pandemic, forward-looking local law enforcement leaders will take steps to prepare their agencies and their communities to respond to the possibly devastating effects of a pandemic event.”

Lee Colwell, author
Article in Police Chief Magazine
January 2006

The World Health Organization has warned us that if a pandemic flu were to occur we should “prepare for massive social and economic disruption.” The WHO along with U.S. federal and state officials have provided convincing arguments based on the current conditions that the time is opportune and that *now* we should be actively engaged in planning for a pandemic. While we wait for more accurate pandemic information we must anticipate and be aggressive in our preparedness planning and pre-event considerations. The unusual and uncommon characteristics of a global disease outbreak of this kind demands that law enforcement agencies review their role, authorities, and capability against a backdrop of pandemic flu. Measures should be taken to establish a resilient workforce by providing the necessary tools and information to better prepare them individually and in their families. Law enforcement agencies can greatly benefit in their preparedness planning by collaborating with their respective health departments, emergency management offices, fire departments, and emergency medical services providers.

The California Office of Emergency Services, Law Enforcement Branch personnel are available to assist your department with direct assistance in mutual aid planning operations, and can assist you in obtaining pandemic-specific planning consultation from the California Department of Health Services and other state agencies. Please contact the OES Law Enforcement Branch’s headquarters office in Sacramento at (916) 845-8700 for your nearest field representative.

NOTE:

The California State Office of Emergency Services will be developing a state level “Concept of Operations” and guidance document for emergency managers by the end of June 2006. This document and others from the medical and health communities will be used during workshops (July) and tabletop exercises (August).

Also, please refer to <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/home/PanFluSummit> for information on an upcoming California-Los Angeles Joint Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Summit: “California and Los Angeles Prepare” on March 30, 2006 from 2:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Although this is an *invitation only* event, interested persons may be able to view by simultaneous satellite broadcast or a post-event webcast. Please check website for update information and details. This event hosted jointly by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.